some secrets are worth sharing by byzinha

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@ajgemmell2101 commented on 1985's "October": when will El tell the girls what she can do?

The short answer is, she won't. The long answer is here.

some secrets are worth sharing

Author's Note:

- For longhairedtae12, love_resistance.

  So, this is a bit of an extra chapter of my previous fic, **1985**. If you don't want to go read it (after all, I know, it's 12 chapters long), here's what you gotta do: El is back, she's living with Hopper, she's in high school and she has 2 girl friends. Except that those two girls friends have no idea that she was a powerful experiment, that she used to be called Eleven, and that she grew up in a lab.
  Most of the things in this oneshot are scenes that were supposed to go in the main fic, but didn't make the cut.
  I hope you like it! And please leave a review at the end? Thank you!

  Disclaimer: The Stranger Things characters are not mine. I added a couple of OCs, because, you know, that happens sometimes, but the OGs?? I have no right.
  Beta'd by @littlecajunlady

The day before what Lexi liked to call "Jennifer's *quinceañera*" also happened to be the day after Thanksgiving, and El decided to bake a cake for her friend and have the girls over for a slumber party – a real one this time, like the ones she saw in movies – and the girls agreed. So many things had happened that month, and the girls were her friends almost as much as the boys.

El believed that she should tell them at least some of the things she went through. She knew for a fact that they wondered what her 011 tattoo meant, they asked about it a couple of times already; and she knew that they were curious as to why she'd been going to the city so often, most of the times scolded by the Chief, who also happened to be her Dad.

Mike told her that one of these Wednesdays when El would leave mysteriously almost without saying goodbye, quickly hopping in her father's car, Lexi was wondering if she was even considered a friend in El's eyes, for the girl seemed to have so many secrets. He worried that they would walk away from her afraid to be a bother, when he knew that El actually really cared about them.

It was about time she did something.

So she baked a cake and they came over. They watched *Sixteen Candles*, even though none of them would be turning sixteen soon, ate popcorn, and Lexi had brought this amazing chicken pie that was her aunt's specialty. El had Hop going to the Byers' while Joyce came to the Hoppers', because it was girls' night and there wasn't another adult woman she trusted more than Will's mom.

"Explain it to me, then," said Jennifer, analyzing the bite of pie on her fork. "What made you want Will over Lucas?"

Lexi almost chocked on her soda, wide eyes turning to Joyce, who just chuckled shaking her head. Jennifer chewed her pie, waiting.

"*No estoy segura de eso,*" Lexi finally decided to answer. "Lucas and I've been friends our whole lives, but I don't know… the romantic part never worked. And then Will was just… *fun*. You know?"

"Yeah, I know," replied Jennifer, a little bitter. It looked like there still was some bad blood going on.

Elle and Joyce looked at each other, raised eyebrows and smiles.

"Elle never picked a side, though," continued the blonde, making El frown. "Between Lexi and I, who was right? Which side would you choose?"

"Will's," replied El in a heartbeat. She looked at each of them as she explained, first Jenny, and then Lexi. "He told you a lot of times that he didn't want to be more than friends, but you never listened; and *you* were an opportunity he didn't miss. Plus, I was told to always choose family first, whatever happens."

"Uh, Will and you are not *family*," Lexi pointed out, and El crossed

her arms.

“Says who?”

“Says blood,” the Latina replied.

“That’s bullshit, and you know it,” El said with certainty, and then she looked at Joyce again, who had gotten up and started to take the empty cups and plates to bring in the cake. El took a deep breath. “You know Hop is not my biological dad, right?”

Jennifer and Lexi exchanged a look.

“We figured,” Jenny said.

“I have a mom, though,” she continued. “But it’s complicated. She used to *work* for the gov- for some people when I was born, and when they let her go, they kept me.”

El breathed in and out slowly, trying to organize her thoughts in a way that would make sense. She didn’t even notice how she was holding her left wrist, covering her number, and only realized it when Lexi spoke again.

“Why would they do that?” she asked, wide eyes on El.

Finger by finger, El let go of her wrist, and then looked down.

“They had their reasons,” she told them. “They managed to keep my mother away, she was considered crazy, and they raised me the way one raises lab rats.”

She showed them her wrist, the known 011, and the girls looked at each other again, concern on their faces.

“I was Eleven until the day I ran away. First people I met were the boys; Mike hid me in his basement for a week until I had to leave again.”

“Mike hid you there?” wondered Jennifer. “When was it?”

“Couple of years ago, when Will disappeared. It’s a really long and

boring story," El dismissed, even though 'boring' wasn't the word to describe that eventful week. Luckily, the girls were focused on another part of her confession.

"That's why you get away with sleeping at Mike's so easily, you're already at home!" exclaimed Lexi.

That wasn't true. El got away with sleeping at Mike's so easily because Karen and Hopper had agreed to keep an eye on them all the time, and they set all those rules about open doors that Elle didn't understand at first, nor mind, for she wasn't a big fan of closed spaces either, but now she guessed why it was important.

"Is that when you fell in love with him?" asked Jennifer. El repeated the question in her head, trying to understand it. *Fall in love*? "Dustin says that you imprinted on Mike like baby ducklings, that's why you two are attached by the tongue now."

Dustin really liked that duckling theory, didn't he? He had spilled it to at least half a dozen people, and El didn't know if she agreed. Mike was one of the first people who was genuinely nice to her, and she knew for a fact that she couldn't let the bad people do to him the same they did to Benny. He *understood* her from the start, even if he did struggle a few times. Damn, she struggled all the time, and even so, he came back to her. At some point, really fast, it just felt natural to come back to him too. It felt more symbiotic than imprinted, she and Mike, from her point of view, but instead of saying all of that, El just shrugged.

"That's not the point," El shook her head. "I'm telling you that I was a lab rat and you're asking about *Mike*?"

Jennifer and Lexi looked down a little embarrassed.

"Sorry," they mumbled.

"What experiments did they do on you?" asked Jenny. "Was it cosmetic?"

"No."

After that, no one said anything for a stretched moment, the girls

waiting for El to add something. She didn't.

"*Okay*…" Lexi said slowly. "So, how did you end up here? With the Chief, I mean."

"Oh, yeah," El nodded. "So I escaped and found the boys, and then I helped find Will too. But I had to leave for a while and I just came back in January. I didn't know what to do, so I looked for Hopper. He was the one who helped me during the time I was away, so it felt obvious. And when everything was settled, we made the adoption official."

"But what about your mom?" asked Jenny. "You said you have one."

"I do, but I didn't know her, I didn't even know I had a mother until I came back. Sometimes I wondered if she even wanted me, if she was looking for me, but when I learned that she did, I couldn't bring myself to go see her. Until."

It was evident in the girls' faces that they were dying to know what happened next. They had never had such an open view of what Elle's life was like before they met her, and to be honest that whole thing about being held in a lab explained *a lot* about her behavior.

Elle's lack of awareness of how people looked at her seemed like a wall, and one of the strong ones. She was fully conscious of her body – how it worked, and how to move – and she was always so sure of herself, even though she wasn't usually sure about everyone else. When the Ps stole her clothes during the first week of classes, Elle didn't even seem bothered. She walked *naked* to where the other girls were (which, you see, if everyone had a body like hers, no one would mind either), asked someone to borrow a towel, and then went out of the locker room.

"Elle, where are you going?" Savannah had asked that time, stopping Elle by the door.

"Getting a change of clothes, Mike always has some," she had answered.

"You can't wear Mike's clothes," someone else commented.

“Why not?” Elle questioned. It sounded like she really wanted an explanation.

“And you can’t go out wearing a towel,” continued Savannah.

“Yeah, that’s why I’m getting a change of clothes,” Elle replied. “I was told I should cover myself, though, and towels can do it. Seriously, the locker is right over there. No harm at all.”

That day, she walked the school’s corridors – and Jennifer made sure to change extra fast to witness that – so calmly among the other students, her long hair wet on her back, with such a confidence that Lexi would *kill for* as she stopped in front of Mike’s locker and got herself a pair of pants and a shirt. It was mesmerizing, how she handled it all, the stares and the whispers.

“What are you doing?” Mike had asked walking the line between ‘*I’m not even surprised*’ and ‘*what in the fuck*’, which seemed like his constant status.

“The Ps stole all my clothes, I’m getting yours,” Elle told him.

“*All* your clothes?” he echoed, a little baffled. She nodded, and pointed at her locker three doors down. He opened it. “*Oh*, all your clothes.”

They didn’t know how she knew that even the extra change of clothes she left in her locker was missing, and no one asked.

“Okay then, but you gotta go change, you’re causing a commotion,” Mike told her, and Elle smiled before she went back to the locker room like it was no biggie.

They wanted to know what came next, because they were finally getting to know this BAMF girl the boys adored, who asked Jennifer a couple of hours before their first game what the rules of hockey were, and then managed to score more goals alone than their adversaries scored together. But before Elle kept talking, Mrs. Byers put this beautiful chocolate cake in front of them that apparently added to the list of things Elle could do very fucking well.

“How are you so good at everything?” wondered Lexi, licking the

frosting from her spoon.

“I’m not,” Elle answered. “English is… *ugh*, so hard! And math is not a piece of cake either.”

“Yeah, but you are great in, like, social studies and Spanish, how do you learn it so fast?” pressed Lexi.

“I was always good at understanding languages,” Elle explained. “And I like to learn history, it makes the world so much better to understand.”

“What about hockey, though?” added Jennifer. “You picked it up like *this*,” she snapped her fingers.

“Sports rules are just like formulas you have to follow,” she said with such calm that they felt almost stupid. “Once you figure them out, all you have to do is execute them. Same thing with baking.”

They did feel kind of stupid now, unsure if they really wanted to know about this girl who sometimes seemed to be a robot. Elle did feelings weird, and she asked weird questions, and she seemed all *wrong*. But then they remembered how she prepared everything to welcome them in her home, and how she was telling them all those things about her past, and that changed their point of view some.

“How bad was it, at the labs?” asked Jenny, her voice small.

“Very,” El answered. “I’m not fully recovered from their influence yet, but I’m getting there. That’s why I called you guys here, to let you know. I think you should know.”

“Like the boys know?” asked Jennifer. “Because they seem aware of everything.”

Well, no. El wouldn’t be telling them *everything*. Damn, she chose her words very carefully that night, had them approved by Hop and Mike, and was trying to make sure to follow a script there (if only the girls could focus, if only she didn’t freak them out at the end of the thing). She just wanted them to know that they were valued, valuable. For her.

Friends tell the truth, El thought to herself. She hoped that half truths worked as friendship as well.

“Well, the boys didn’t know where I was going this month,” El deflected. “Just Mike, because we tell each other everything. But I didn’t tell the others where I was going, because I wanted to make sure I was doing the right thing.”

Will figured it out, the way El knew he would. And the best thing about Will was that he was really good at keeping secrets (hence: last year’s big trouble with the slugs). Lucas and Dustin only found out last week, and that’s because she finally told them. And now-

“You’re telling us now, aren’t you?” asked Lexi, and El nodded. “Is this about your mother?”

El nodded again, but she had to talk now, it was inevitable.

“Yeah, I was visiting her,” she confessed. “And I will keep visiting her. She lives in the city, and she’s quite ill, but we are getting closer. She was here yesterday, for Thanksgiving.”

El felt the whole Terry thing very heavy on her shoulders, but when she looked up at the girls, they were smiling sympathetically, serene faces observing her. It felt… like a relief.

“Ellie,” started Jenny. “You can trust us with those things.”

“Yeah, I know,” El nodded, even though she hadn’t been really sure, especially after Lexi had put together that fake slumber party and all, but now… “I just… needed some time, but I like you guys. I really do. And I don’t want you to ever doubt about my friendship, okay?”

“We don’t,” said Jenny quickly. “Well, most of the time. It’s just that you’re so *strange*,” she tried to explain, and it actually made El laugh.

“Strange sounds better than weirdo, and Lucas used to call me that all the time,” she said. “So I can live with that.”

“Besides,” added Lexi. “What you told us tonight explains a lot of things, like…”

“Like how the boys don’t mind explaining to you all the most simple stuff,” Jennifer brought the example, and Lexi’s eyes went wide.

“Oh! And you really didn’t know what the Madonna song meant, did you?” El shook her head no.

“Not at the time, but now I do,” she said.

“Well, now we can explain stuff to you too,” Jenny said excitedly. “And better yet, from a girl’s point of view.”

“That’s actually great,” Joyce interrupted them, and the girls looked at her. She smiled. “So, two thirds of the teenagers in this room made out with my son. He sure has a diverse taste.”

El wanted to laugh, but she didn’t know if she’d be a very good person if she did. Jen and Lexi’s faces were priceless, though, and it was really hard to keep a straight face for them as Joyce grilled them a bit, so El decided to go clean the dishes. She put everything in the sink, but then she saw the phone there, waiting, so she reached for it and dialed one of the only 3 numbers she bothered to memorize.

“Hi, Mrs. Wheeler? It’s El. Can I talk to Mike?”